



FILE DESCRIPTION

SUBJECT Thurgood Marshall

FILE NO. Headquarters file 66-6200-44-441

623.

Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : Mr. Tolson

DATE: March 26, 1956

FROM : L. B. Nichols

SUBJECT: *key*

Assistant Attorney General Warren Olney came up to see me on the morning of March 23, 1956. He stated he had had a very satisfactory discussion with the Attorney General on the kidnaping situation. The Attorney General was pleased over the outcome and how it had been resolved.

He then pointed out the Attorney General had asked him to discuss with me the very delicate matter of civil rights and the delicacy involved in utilizing and determining preliminary investigations and making the investigations at the direction of the Criminal Division.

Olney then referred to the current controversy which he is having with Thurgood Marshall and gave me copies of the letters which had been exchanged between Marshall and Olney. It started with an item in the Washington Post carrying a story stating that Thurgood Marshall had launched into an hour-long attack upon the Department for failing to use the powers it already has. Olney wrote a sharp letter to Marshall on this. Marshall replied, denying that he had engaged in an hour-long discussion and sought to justify himself. Olney then in a four-page letter goes after Marshall and the over-all problem and the fact that the Department had done all that it could. It seems that the references to the Bureau in this letter correctly set forth our position. *Letter of Mar. 19 is indicated.*

Olney then pointed out that the problem he was talking about was illustrated by the delegation from the National Council of Negro Women who called upon the Attorney General wherein they came in to see the Attorney General and complained because the Department had not investigated the case and related cases. The Attorney General stated that the Department had investigated. The Attorney General in making this statement was referring to the fact that adequate information had been gathered upon which the Department could decide that there was or there was not a Federal violation. Subsequently, the delegation came in to see the Director and the Director had stated that no investigation had been made in certain instances.

cc: *[redacted]*
Mr. Rosen

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ENCLOSURE

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I told Olney that I was present when the Director met with the National Council of Negro Women and that the Director had clearly differentiated between preliminary inquiry and full field investigation, and the Director had specifically used the phraseology that available facts were gathered and presented to the Department; that the Director made it clear where there was no full field investigation that available facts had been submitted to the Department which reflected no violation of a Federal law within our jurisdiction and hence no request was made by the Criminal Division to make a full field investigation.

Olney then stated that there was no complaint whatsoever that there was any effort being made to unload the responsibility; that it was believed a group such as the delegation of Negro Women does not fully understand the difference between preliminary inquiry and full field investigation and has the feeling that only perfunctory handling is being given, when this is not correct, and adequate information is presented. Olney feels that there is a problem over the meaning of the phraseology. I told him that it seemed very clear to us; that if he thought this was the case, ~~then~~ he could take a sampling of cases and show what the complaint was and what the investigation showed and that invariably it would be determined that the investigation narrowed the scope of the complaint since complaints are over-stated rather than under-stated. Olney stated that he had never seen a statement issued by the Bureau that was not actually correct; that what the Attorney General had in mind was that there should be a full understanding so that there would be no opportunity to play the Bureau against the Criminal Division and *visa versa*.

He then mentioned that invariably when these investigations began, ^{b7c} as in the case of the investigation in Cobb County growing out of the ~~case~~ case, that there is a hue and cry directed against the Department. I told Olney, this, of course, could be expected in such cases where there is the appearance of injecting ourselves in local situations, and that the subsequent explanation given, namely that the investigation was necessitated by the Supreme Court decision as contrasted to a complaint received, had a salutary effect; and that certainly it would appear that where there was a good reason, the reason could be stated; and if we could have it, we would be in a position to explain, for example, to a county attorney that in view of the Supreme Court decision, the Criminal Division had concluded that the FBI should inquire into such and such a situation. I thought that Olney would take exception but he didn't.

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Mr. Olney then pointed out that he wanted to tell us about how the Department contemplated proceeding in the Mound Bayou matter. He stated that the Department fully realized if they presented the facts to a grand jury, there would be no indictment. They, therefore, struck upon the idea of initiating prosecution by the filing of a criminal information; however, they have now concluded that when the Attorney General appeared before a Congressional Committee to seek the adoption of the legislative program, the Attorney General, in illustrating the need for civil sanctions, could point out in cases such as the Mound Bayou case where there was a clear disenfranchisement, the legislation requested would enable the Department to proceed on a civil basis. I made the point that it seemed that if the Department was going to proceed in the Mound Bayou case that it should have been done last fall as soon as the information was completed. He agreed to this. He also made the observation that it was advantageous for the Department to change its plans some weeks ago and hold up on the Mound Bayou case. I told him that it was rather clear that as long as the Mississippi legislature was in session that there would be an outburst and that the session was scheduled to end sometime in April, and that had the Department proceeded in the Mound Bayou case, it appeared rather obvious that the action of the Governor in vetoing the bill would merely have resulted in additional legislation and that it was understood that as soon as the legislature was out, the Governor was going to start going around the state and try to develop better understanding. Olney thought that the manner in which the Attorney General had decided to use the Mound Bayou case would be much more effective; that they could always file the informations at a later date if the thing did not turn out.

Summarizing, I gathered the distinct impression that what Olney was driving at was the use of phraseology in the Bureau, namely that we investigate or do not investigate civil rights cases at the direction of the Criminal Division other than in reporting preliminary facts. I do not see that there is any problem that was brought up which would require any change in procedure.

*I think too many
"observations" are being
made to Olney. Perhaps
much prefer that what
Olney has to say be placed
in writing & our replies be
likewise.*

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